

OUR STORY TOO - LESSON 15

(A) *Spirituality and Justice*

- (1) To underscore the importance of both spirituality and justice, Wright cites the prophecy recorded in Micah 6:6-8, namely, that which is good and which God asks of us is:

- (a) to do what is just-----
(b) to show constant love-----
(c) to live in humble fellowship with our God-----

- (2) Wright quotes a 1843 speech of Henry Highland Garnett, in which this well-known black Presbyterian pastor declared that black slaves should seek freedom through force if necessary. In a one-paragraph essay explain what led Garnett and others to insist on justice and freedom now and not in the "sweet bye-and-bye"? How does the black spiritual "Oh Freedom" illustrate their feelings?

(Look for a clear and insightful discussion, which should include something about human freedom coming from God, no one having the right to take away another's freedom, the importance of standing up and taking one's freedom - even if one has to forcibly do it, the idea that freedom is more important than life itself and is worth dying for.)

- (3) Wright also cites a 1838 speech of Frederick Douglas in which this escapee from slavery describes how racism infects white Christians, making them hypocritical and poor examples of Christian faith. In a one-paragraph essay explain what Wright means when he says there are two different views of God and humankind (the masters' view and the slaves' view, white religion and black religion), and these two different views are inherently antithetical.

(Look for a clear and insightful discussion, which should include something about black people having a clear sense that God was mightily opposed to their slavery and oppression, black people having a clear sense that their Christian faith spoke to all of their life, and white people compartmentalizing their religion so that it did not have an impact on the way they treated blacks and/or acted economically.)

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- (10) (4) Wright also cites the 1968 Kerner Commission Report (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders) headed by Otto Kerner, Governor of State of Illinois. This Presidential Commission warned that North America is heading toward two different societies: white people and people of color. Two dangers that would result from this drift toward two different societies would be sustained violence in the cities and the repudiation of the American ideals of freedom, dignity, and equal opportunity for all. In a one-paragraph essay give your personal response. In your view, is this where North America is heading? Are we there already? Are the dangers real?

(Look for a clear and insightful personal response. Does the student back up his/her comments?)

- (5) James Forbes and others (Jones and Gardner) insist on an incarnational theology, in which things that do not normally seem to go together (spirit and flesh, divinity and humanity, the infinite and the finite) do hang together in dialectical tension.

In a two-paragraph essay explain and give your personal response to Gardner's contention that love and justice are both necessary and that they have to go together, that one without the other means the nullification of both. Explain what he means. Does this ring true to your own personal experience?

(15) What Gardner means:

- (a) Both love and justice are necessary. Love in personal relationships is not a substitute for justice in society. If we restrict love just to personal relationships, then societal structures go unmonitored.
- (b) Love and justice are interrelated.
 - love is the fulfillment of justice.
 - justice is a necessary instrument of love.
 - love is the ultimate norm of justice.
 - love is the end and ~~the~~ justice is the means by which the end is attained.

(For personal response, look for clarity and insight.)



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(6) James Forbes presents a four point paradigm for how spirituality and justice are an extension of the incarnation. Outline these four points.

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(a) Tension is normal and to be expected in incarnational theology.

(b) Any relaxation or reduction of that tension is heresy. It must be both-and, not either-or. It must be both spiritual and social, both spirituality and justice.

(c) Faithful commitment to both sides of this dialectical tension (both spirituality and justice) is essential.

(d) We must have complete confidence in God's capacity to coordinate both sides. We must trust that God can pull it all together and hold it together.

(7) Wright explains how a commitment to both spirituality and justice can work out in the real life of a local church by outlining the various activities of his church. How could such a commitment to both spirituality and justice be acted in a local MCC congregation? Explain in an essay of one or two paragraphs.

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(Look for practical suggestions, as well as clarity and insight. Look for some understanding of ministry that embraces both spirituality and justice concerns.)

(8) Forbes maintains that our theology is basic to all else. Theology is all-important because it determines anthropology, and anthropology determines sociology.

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By this he means that how one views God determines how one views other humans; and how one views other humans determines how one orders society.

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- (9) Since theology is basic to everything else, according to Wright, Theology can lead to a unified nation or to segregation. Theology can lead to equality among all persons or to apartheid. Theology can lead to a witness for peace or to World War III. Theology can lead to equal distribution of goods and resources or to greed. Theology can lead to salvation (God-centeredness) or to sin (self-centeredness).

So, Wright maintains, we need a new theology if we are truly serious about both spirituality and justice. We need a theology that takes the incarnation seriously, that takes both souls and society seriously, that understands the church as an extension of the incarnation.

Do you agree that we need a new theology? Explain why or why not in a one-page essay.

(25) (Look for a clear and insightful discussion of whether a new theology is needed, of incarnational theology. Does the student show awareness of how the theology we adopt/embrace determines the ecclesiological and sociological structures we set up? Does the student back up what she/he says?)

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- (A) *A Messenger of God's Truth*, an article reprint page 163 of this course manual

(1) Sojourner's early years as a slave had developed in her a passion for freedom, and she committed her life to the struggle to end human bondage.

(2) Sojourner remained illiterate all her life, but although she could not read books, she could "read people". Explain what this meant.

Her understanding of human nature was profound. She possessed a combination of fiery wit and gentle wisdom that had an effect on all who met her.

(3) Sojourner not only agitated for the political rights of her people, but also gave herself in service to their needs. The most graphic example of this was working among the freed slaves who fled in the 1860's to the city of Washington, D.C.

(4) More than a hundred years ago, Sojourner anguished about the "two Washingtons". By this she meant:

- (a) the powerful and prestigious one downtown
- (b) the powerless and poor one just a mile away

(B) *Sojourner Truth: A Pillar of Fire*, an article reprint pages 165-170 of this course manual

(1) Sojourner's childhood name was Isabella. Her parents' names were Baumfree and Mau Mau Bett. Her first language was a Dutch dialect.

(2) What spiritual truths did Isabella's mother teach her?

- (a) There is a God who sees and hears everything you think and do.
- (b) When you are beaten or cruelly treated, or you fall into any kind of trouble, you must ask God's help.
- (c) God will always hear you and help you.

(3) What happened to Isabella when she was nine years old? Explain in a few sentences.

Her master Charles Hardenbergh died, leaving his relatives to decide the fate of his slaves. Both Isabella and her brother Peter were sold away, Isabella to John Nealy of Ulster County, New York, for a paltry \$100.

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- (4) What happened to her when she was ten years old that stayed with her the rest of her life?

1 Nealy whipped her with a bundle of rods until deep gashes were cut into her flesh and blood streamed from her wounds. The scars from this beating stayed with her the rest of her life.

- (5) To cope with what was happening to her, Isabella turned to the God her mother had talked about. What were the three stages she went through in these first conversations with God?

3 (a) She asked God to protect her from her persecutors.

(b) As the abuse grew worse, she pleaded with God to tell her what she was doing against God's will to bring such tragedy upon herself.

(c) Before long, she knew that her only prayer could be one for deliverance from the Nealys, and she begged God to send to her her father.

- (6) Isabella's next master was named Martin Scriver who had the double occupation of fisherman and tavern owner. Isabella's work in this new environment included unloading boats at the wharf and hauling herbs and roots for the tavern's liquors.

- (7) At 13 years of age, Isabella was bought by a plantation owner named John Dumont. Why did he consider her "better than a man"?

2 She could do as much as six others in the fields and still do the laundry at night.

- (8) What were the circumstances of the death of Isabella's mother?

2 She became ill with palsy and a fever sore in one of her limbs. Her husband came home one day and found her dead - from sickness, toil, and unending grief over the loss of her last children.

- (9) What were the circumstances of the death of Isabella's father?

1 He was moved out of the old cellar home by the Hardenberghs, and a short while later was discovered frozen to death in a miserable shack.

- (10) Isabella made a "sanctuary" among some willow trees for her daily conversations with God. In a few sentences describe her prayer times.

2 She always began with the Lord's Prayer, chanted in the Dutch her mother had taught her. Then she went on to recount her sins and sufferings to God, begging for forgiveness at times, commanding God to set things straight at others. She questioned, cajoled, and bargained with her Lord.

- (11) Isabella fell in love with a slave named Robert on a neighboring estate, but she was given in marriage to a slave named Thomas. She gave birth to 5 children.

- (12) What was special about the date July 4, 1827 that Isabella longed for it to come?

1 On that day all the slaves in New York State would be freed.

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- (13) What prompted her to lose trust in the master-slave system and to run away? Explain in one paragraph.

③ Dumont had promised to free her a year earlier than July 4, 1827, since she had been such a faithful slave. But then Isabella contracted a disease in her hand that hampered her work, and Dumont withdrew this promise. His subterfuge dealt a further blow to Isabella's trust in this system that gave all power to white masters.

- (14) Whom did Isabella take with her on her escape? her infant daughter Soph

Who provided them refuge? a Quaker couple named Van Wagener

- ③ Why did she eventually return to her master? Explain in a few sentences.

The Van Wagners were staid Quaker folk, and their life held no excesses of either pain or pleasure. Isabella's roving spirit found life there too placid. After several months a visit by John Dumont tempted her to return with him.

- (15) Isabella's first encounter with Jesus was dramatic:

② (a) showering her with... the forgiveness that only Jesus can offer

(b) inviting her to... a love so profound that she was able to forgive even her white persecutors

- (16) What had happened to her son Peter in her absence?

He had been illegally sold to a wealthy Alabama planter named Fowler.

③ What did she do to get her son back?

With the help of the Quakers she went to the New York grand jury in Kingston to register a complaint.

What happened? What was so unusual about this?

The white slave owner was arrested and made to post \$600 for his court appearance. And she got her son back. In 1828 a black woman taking a white man to court and winning was unheard of.

- ① (17) In 1829 Isabella moved to the city of New York City. She began work at Magdalene House, which was a refuge for women off the streets.

- ② (18) She got mixed up with a religious fanatic named Matthias and was accused along with him of poisoning Elijah Pierson. What was the outcome of her trial?

The all-white jury not only acquitted her but also awarded her \$125 in damages for any suffering her character might have undergone throughout the ordeal.

- (19) Why did Isabella decide to leave New York?

② (a) She grew increasingly uncomfortable with the corruption and vice

(b) She felt a call to take her message about Jesus to other parts of the la

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- (20) Isabella's departure from New York represented a break from all that had been before, and she decided she needed a new name.

Why the first name of "Sojourner"?

The name "Sojourner" came to her because she planned to "travel up and down the land" and be a "sign to the people".

Why the last name of "Truth"?

Realizing that God was her last master and that God's name is Truth, she took the name of Truth.

- (21) Sojourner became known for her powerful singing, preaching, and presence. Her early wanderings took her through the states of Connecticut and Massachusetts. She settled for a time in the town of Northampton.

- (22) What was the occasion for Sojourner's well-known speech "Ain't I A Woman?"

An 1852 women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio

Why was she at first scorned at this convention by both men and women?

Many men had come to argue vigorously against women's rights. Many women there feared that their cause might be undermined if it were perceived to be sympathetic to the abolitionist struggle.

- (23) How did Sojourner respond to the physician Dr. T.W. Strain who tried to stop her from speaking in Indiana by accusing her of being a man? Explain in one paragraph.

Rising and speaking with fiery indignation to her tormentors, Sojourner said that her breasts had suckled many white babies when they should have suckled her own, and that many of these babies had in her estimation grown to be far more manly than her persecutors. She then said that she dared to show her breasts to the whole congregation - not to her own shame but to her persecutors. She then opened her dress from collar to waist and said, "See for yourself!".

- (24) Explain in one paragraph why militancy increased among abolitionists in the 1850's.

The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 criminalized escape from slavery and opened the way for more violence against blacks. Despairing that their speeches and petitions would ever bring emancipation of the slaves, many abolitionists began to see armed resistance as the only recourse.

- (25) What was Sojourner's response to Frederick Douglas when he asserted that slavery would end only with bloodshed?

"Frederick, is God dead?"

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- (26) There was a split in the abolition and suffrage movement with one side saying that the only just goal was universal suffrage, and the other side maintaining that it was important to first secure the enfranchisement of blacks (men) and later of women.

Which of these views prevailed?

The latter view of enfranchising black men first, and then later work on rights for women.

- (27) What were Sojourner's prophetic words in 1867 about the fight for women's suffrage?

"I am for keeping the thing going while things are stirring; because if we wait till it is still, it will take a great while to get it going again."

- (28) Although Sojourner had a huge number of friends and admirers, she developed an equally large number of foes. How did they unleash their hatred on her?

She was beaten with clubs and pelted with stones, and one occasion she received a wound that later led to an ulcerated leg. Once in Angola, Indiana, persecutors threatened to burn down a hall where she was scheduled to speak.

- (29) During the Civil War, Sojourner settled for a time in the town of Battle Creek, Michigan. She was attracted there by a spiritual community and by the town's anti-slavery sentiment.

- (30) In 1864 Sojourner decided to go to Washington, D.C. to meet with President Abraham Lincoln.

- (31) Once in Washington, Sojourner decided to stay a while because of the misery she saw among the former slaves who had come there. For the previous 20 years her ministry had been preaching and agitating among white people. Now she felt God's call to remain with her own for a while.

Her work in Washington included:

- (a) offering counsel
- (b) teaching hygiene
- (c) nursing the sick
- (d) finding work for her people
- (e) leading the resistance to Maryland raiders kidnapping black children

- (32) Now that black people were freed from slavery, Sojourner put her energy in a new dream, one that failed, namely a land grant for blacks in the U.S. West.

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- (33) How did Sojourner help to change the Jim Crow laws in the street cars of Washington?

2 When she refused to be put out of a car, the conductor pushed her up against the door, dislocating her shoulder. She had the conductor arrested and dismissed.

- (34) Other moral and civil causes to which Sojourner devoted energy included:

- 2 (a) for temperance
(b) against child labor
(c) against capital punishment
(d) for equal pay for equal work

- (35) What was the new vision that Sojourner received during her last years? Explain in one paragraph.

3 She dreamed that black people would bring whites out of darkness into the marvelous light. Blacks would teach the slaveholders the truth that they never had and never knew of. Blacks would be a people, for there was a purpose in God allowing them to be robbed and scourged all the days of their life.

- (36) As a result of this new vision (#35), Sojourner found the faith to take the most difficult step of her long life journey, the step of forgiving her white persecutors and envisioning their salvation. This step became very personal for her when she visited her former master John Dumont.

- 1 (37) Sojourner died in the year 1883. The stone that marked her grave bore the words "Is God Dead?"

- (C) *Ain't I a Woman?*, an article reprint pages 172-174 of this course manual

- (1) In 1852 Sojourner decided to attend a women's rights convention in the city of Akron, Ohio.

1 Why were the leaders of the convention upset at her presence there?

They were afraid their enemies and detractors would use Sojourner's presence there to say that this convention was merely a disguised abolition affair.

- (2) Several male clergy had come to this convention to argue against women's rights. Three of the arguments they used were:

- 3 (a) Men should have superior rights and privileges because of their superior intellects.
(b) If God had desired the equality of women, God would have given some token of God's will through the birth, life, and death of Christ Jesus.
(c) Look at what has happened on account of Eve.

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(3) How did Sojourner respond to these three arguments presented by the male clergy?

(a) What does intellect have to do with rights for women or blacks? If someone's cup is smaller than yours, you would be mean not to let them have it full.

(b) Christ came from God and a woman. Man had nothing to do with it.

(c) If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all along, these women together ought to be able to turn it back and get it rightside up again. Now that they are asking to do it, the men better let them.

(D) *Like Oil on Agitated Waters*, an article reprint pages 175-176 of this course manual

(1) What was the disturbance at this Northampton camp meeting?

A bunch of rowdy young men were out for a good time. They were entertaining themselves by annoying and hurting the feelings of others, hooting and yelling, and interrupting the services.

(2) Why was Sojourner afraid and hiding?

Realizing that she was the only black person there, she thought that their wicked mischief might well fall on her first, and perhaps fatally.

(3) When her confidence was restored as a "servant of the living God", what did Sojourner decide to do?

She decided to do what she could to still the raging of these wild young men.

What specifically did she do to accomplish this?

She sang, thereby gathering a group around her, and then spoke to them.

(E) *She Smiles Within My Smile*, an article reprint page 171 of this course manual

(1) Alice Walker views Sojourner as a spiritual ancestor or a "spirit helper". For Walker this means that Sojourner and others like her make us more ourselves by extending us far beyond.

(2) Alice Walker feels a double bond with Sojourner:

(a) They are both as concerned about the rights of women as of men

(b) They share the same name. (mystical bond)

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(F) *A Refusal To Be Silenced*, an article reprint pages 172-173 of this course manual

(1) According to Jacquelin Grant, Sojourner was way ahead of her time in that she saw the connections between the three ism's: racism_____, sexism_____, and classism_____.

It was her experience as a black woman that gave her this insight.

(2) According to Grant, Sojourner offers a challenge to a particular group of people today, namely black women in ministry. That challenge is that a call from God is not to a false notion of pietistic spirituality but rather toward wholistic liberation.

(3) What was Sojourner's favorite sermon to preach?

An account of her life from the time of her parents' enslavement to the time of her own encounter with Jesus, the one who heard her cries even when no one else would or could.

(G) *Then I Will Speak Upon the Ashes*, an article reprint pages 174-176 of this course manual

(1) Sojourner's famous words in response to a threat to burn down the hall in Indiana in which she was scheduled to hold a rally were:

"Then I will speak upon the ashes."

(2) Her mother had taught her that one must not be defeated by the injustice, cruelty, and evil of the world.

Her mother also taught her to pray and to be tough-headed and tough-hearted.

(3) Sojourner's entire life was undergirded by an unshakeable faith in God. She was known to begin most of her addresses with the words:

"Children, I speak to God, and God speaks to me."

